DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 601 CS 213 679

AUTHOR Hillman, Linda
TITLE Non-Tenure Track Positions in Writing Programs: A Narrative of One.
PUB DATE 21 Mar 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (42nd, Boston, MA, March 20-23, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjunct Faculty; *College Faculty; *Females; *Freshman Composition; Higher Education; *Nontenured Faculty; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *De Paul University IL; *English Teachers

ABSTRACT

The freshmen writing faculty at DePaul University (Illinois) was comprised of 10 female non-tenure track instructors in the spring term of 1990. The core program for freshmen taking the introductory writing course pairs the English course with a history course, thus combining a study of civilization with a study of writing and rhetoric, and requiring a great deal of commitment and preparation for the instructors. A department policy was instituted in 1989 establishing that instructors hired on yearly, non-tenure contracts could only renew those contracts for 4 years. Considering the workload of the freshmen writing instructors, this announcement that they were dispensable was worrisome and discouraging. Meetings between the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the instructors resulted in three options presented to the dean for his consideration. The dean praised the instructors for their commitment and was willing to make them aware of any academic professional openings. But within the English department, some hostility was expressed by tenured faculty. The instructors' departmental voting rights were revoked. The conclusion of the 10 instructors is that tenure is a bogus and hurtful system. What really counts for teachers is the experience of being in the classroom with the students, an experience that cannot be supplied by a doctorate degree alone. (A post-script dated March 1993, reflecting changes since the paper's publication, is attached.) (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED353601

Non-Tenure-Track Positions in Writing Programs: A Narrative of One

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Linda Hillman

DePaul University

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Linda D. Hillman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This paper was originally read at the CCCC Convention, March 21, 1991, in Boston, Massachusetts, under the title **"Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?: Longevity and Adjunct Faculty."**

Colleagues and Friends:

What I want to do in the next several minutes is to tell you our story--the story of ten full-time adjunct faculty members, of whom I am one, and our memorable 1990 spring term. I want to tell you a bit about our program, its history and its present. Actually, this story is a collaborative effort, as the opinions in it are a synthesis of thoughts gathered through interviews with the other nine women--the non-tenure-track instructors--who are the freshman writing faculty at DePaul University.

DePaul University's freshman writing program has been evolving into its present form for about ten years. It is called Common Studies, a sequence of two courses taught in conjunction with the history department. When a student registers for Common Studies, she must register for a paired history and English section. Therefore, the same group of students experience two faculty members, one from English and one from history, who collaborate on various projects for these paired courses in history and writing.

The program's intent has always been to combine the study of civilization with

CS213679

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

rhetoric and composition to produce a set of courses with full global coverage. Teachers in both courses incorporate the studies of China, India, the Islamic world, Sub-Saharan Africa, Pre-Columbian America, Latin America and the Western Experience. They examine the legacies of civilizations: truth, beauty, order and authority, and they work to understand how ideas fit together to shape society and history. (An example of our writing assignments might include a study of Confucius' Analects and a subsequent paper in which students evaluate the Analects' applicability to today's world, or perhaps a reading of primary source accounts of the Battle at Wounded Knee to examine point of view and so on.)

Needless to say, preparing these courses is demanding work. Many part-time instructors cannot justify the amount of time necessary for preparation, grading, and collaboration for these courses, and the full-time tenure-track faculty find them burdensome for the same reasons. But the university has been committed to these courses and the English department has had to staff them. So began the collection of ten full-time, but non-tenure-track instructors, who have provided the continuity, evaluation, and constant improvement for building the program into what it is today.

In addition to the Common Studies Program, we offer four pre-freshman courses, two reading courses and two writing courses, for students who are not yet ready for the rigors of Common Studies. We don't consider them remedial courses, but the students who take them are at risk for one reason or another. They may be ESL students, athletes, transfer students, or other bright students who have not been asked to write with much discipline in high school. They are placed into these courses through a placement exam which all students sit for when they are admitted. The instructors teach most of these courses too, as do part-time

faculty and nine Instructional Associates--part-time faculty hired for one year with benefits to teach six rather than nine courses for that year. There are 27 full-time English department faculty members--ten of us are non-tenure track.

We ten have always had one-year, renewable contracts, and they have always been renewed. Over the years, some of us have taken unpaid leaves of absence for various reasons such as maternity leaves or in my case, to go to East Africa to train Peace Corps volunteers to teach English as a second language in Kenyan "harambee" schools. Or from time to time, we have administered various other programs which support the English department or the university.

A cut-off year was never mentioned to any of us when we were hired. However, in May 1989, our Chair issued the following memo. He stated that

> For some time now, there has been a need to establish a clear policy on the length of non-tenure-track instructorships for the mental health of those holding such appointments and of those charged with putting together schedules each year. At last a policy has been established, to wit: Instructorships in the Department of English are annual appointments, but may be renewed for a maximum of five years for those appointed for the 1988-1989 academic year or earlier. All appointments for 1989-90 and in the future will be renewable for a maximum of four years.

This new announcement gave the ten of us pause. We knew ours were not full-time temporary appointments filling non-recurring instructional needs. Neither had we been hired as short-term visiting professors or replacements for tenure-line faculty on leave. We were filling a major program need. We began to think about what we did for DePaul. Here is what we found.

The tenure-track English faculty does not, as a rule, teach freshman writing. Next fall, only two are slated to teach Common Studies, so it is fair to say that the instructors <u>are</u>

"the writing faculty." Together, we ten teach between 1,300 and 1,800 students each year. Consequently, we read and evaluate between 11,000 and 15,000 student papers in that year. We evaluate the writing placement tests--in 1989-1990, that was 4,227 tests, each of which was read twice. We co-author the Common Studies textbook, Rhetoric and Civilization, and serve on committees with the history faculty to develop, evaluate, and revise our Common Studies sequence.

We organize workshops to train tutors and new part-time faculty, and we have had student teachers from the graduate programs doing long-term observations in our courses. We teach word-processing to all freshman, coordinate writing contests, and review textbooks and audio-visual materials for recommendation to the libraries.

We serve on college and university committees. We advise students, and we participate in professional organizations by presenting papers on composition, literature, ESL, and our own personal research. We publish in our areas and participate in normal scholarly endeavors such as writing book reviews, journal articles, and textbooks. We do consulting on writing in the business community and give teacher training workshops nationally and internationally. And we also teach introductory literature courses and other undergraduate and graduate-level writing courses. Yes, indeed, our Chair's announcement via memo, that we were dispensable, gave us pause.

We asked ourselves why the university would want to categorically dismiss us over the next two or three years when it had invested so much time and money to train us in the form of NEH grants, conference support like this one, and other constant professional development opportunities. Why would they want to let us go when the results of the

Common Studies self-evaluation in the spring of 1990 clearly indicated the growing college-wide perception that our students' ability to articulate ideas in writing had steadily improved, and that we had had a direct responsibility for this positive feedback? What full-time English faculty member would want to lose us so that he would be assigned these freshman level writing courses that take so much re-tooling to be able to teach? If the ten of us were "nutty" enough to be committed to teaching in this demanding program that the university supported, then why would this stable foundation for one of the major programs in the university's Master Plan for growth be undermined by constantly having to rehire and retrain new faculty?

It seemed like poor business sense to us, and we decided to help the university see that. Besides, we liked teaching what we taught, and we were very good at it--our student evaluations, to a person, have always been among the highest in the department.

The ten of us met several times last spring to collaborate on a paper that would support a meeting with our Dean--the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences--to discuss our status as employees. Several times we were joined by our Director of Composition, a tenured faculty member, and two other administrators responsible for large freshman programs. After a number of drafts, we came up with our document. As part of our cover memo, we asked the Dean for a commitment to consider flexible, creative solutions to our current problem--that of categorical dismissal from our jobs--although most of us had taught at DePaul for more years than our current contracts reflected. We stated that because we wanted the opportunity to continue to support the university's goals and to serve our students, we wanted him to explore with us possible models of employment--both just

and legal--that would benefit both the University and us. We did not ask for tenure, because we knew, of course, that it was not even a remote possibility.

We did collaborate to write this document, and we did have our meeting with the Dean in June of 1990, but the situation was complicated by two unsettling developments which threatened the delicate balance between the stability and creativity of our generally very congenial department, and our writing program's success. Our Director of Composition, who had provided leadership for the program, faculty and students for the past seven years announced her leaving DePaul to become Director of Composition at Cal State Northridge, and our Chair of nine years announced that he was leaving to become the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. For the purpose of our paper, we argued that their departures, though regrettable, were unavoidable, but that the loss of the ten full-time instructors, was not only regrettable, but more important, avoidable, especially during this time of departmental change and of growing enrollments--at that time, DePaul had had an impressive 14% increase in student applications for the 1990-91 academic year.

Our paper stated our vast contributions and our commitment to teaching freshman writing, and it made the case that *the teaching of undergraduate writing was our vocation, not an intrusion into our professional lives*. We asked the Dean to consider one of three creative possibilities so that the university might retain our services to our mutual benefit. Those that we proposed are situations that exist successfully in other institutions that are secure enough in themselves to support them.

First we suggested "teaching track positions." These would entail secure, long-term

employment of the instructors through the establishment of a "teaching track," or the continued renewal of contracts subject to university enrollment and evaluations of instructors. The second suggestion was for the creation of "Academic Professional Positions;" that is, the creation of permanent "academic professional positions" which combine part-time teaching with administrative, counselling, or consulting duties, especially in the areas of undergraduate support and retention. And finally, we suggested "Individual Staff-Teaching Positions": "Individual" placement of instructors in "staff or teaching positions" where their experience and expertise complemented the personnel needs of the university.

As a group, we considered our meeting with the Dean successful. He praised us for what we had given DePaul over the years, and he said that while he was not prepared to commit to the "secure teaching track," he would be willing to make us aware of any Academic Professional positions that became available. In fact, since that meeting, one of us has been hired as the Assistant Director of the Writing Programs, and another has taken a part-teaching, part-campus-ministry position. Last month, the Dean sent (to only the ten of us) job descriptions for two more similar part-teaching, part-administrative positions that look interesting to three of us. Clearly the Dean has lived up to this commitment to find places for us in the DePaul community even though they are not straight teaching positions as some of us would prefer.

But there were outcomes of our collaborative endeavor other than our commitment from the Dean, and I want to mention them because they are closer to home--they show what can happen when issues of enfranchisement arise. They have to do with our immediate community, our own department.

We had circulated a draft of our proposal to the English faculty and the history faculty, with whom we teach in Common Studies, in hopes of receiving feedback, support and suggestions. Little did we know that a number of the tenured English department faculty, by whom we had never felt demeaned or rejected, would be threatened by our document requesting security--not tenure. Several simply stopped speaking to us. Others acted embarrassed around us and said nothing about the issue at all or wrote venomous memos to each other, to the Dean and to the history faculty who had written wonderfully supportive letters on our behalf. Only three went on record as supporting the need to find a more secure position for us within the university.

All this was going on while three of the tenure-track faculty were competing for the newly vacant position of Chair. Only one of those candidates, in her position paper, mentioned the possibility that the instructor issue could be creatively solved without undoing the tenure system. Ironically, while most of our own department didn't seem to want to "love us tomorrow," the history faculty and others in the university who had benefitted from working with us, or students who have studied with us, did. Their letters apparently helped the Dean to decide favorably toward us.

But now there is a different feeling in our department, and frankly it makes us angry and sad. While our proposal gave us visibility, and allowed us to argue for security for ourselves and therefore for continuity in a program central to the DePaul freshman experience, it also gave us a finer sense of the word "irony." There is more to teaching than being a good teacher. We are like "loose cannons"--a force to be reckoned with, but no one will, except that this fall, our new chair announced that we ten would no longer have the

departmental voting privileges that we had always enjoyed.

One of the reasons we cared to work at DePaul was because we had always felt like faculty. No one had ever made us feel as if we were less than faculty because we mostly taught writing. But now there is a subtle "second class" thing in the air. It doesn't keep us from doing well in our courses or from participating in the university as we always have, but it has made us less grateful and more realistic. We are sad that a place we are devoted to by choice has become rather inhospitable. No one likes to feel replaceable--to be needed, but not really wanted, is demoralizing.

In the end, we feel that tenure is a bogus system. It keeps many excellent teachers out. It can't reward their scholarship or contribution. It causes rifts, rifts that don't have to do with arguments about excellence in teaching or about how students are best served. Let's face it: the university isn't doing exactly the same work as it used to. Now most freshmen need literacy. The most rapidly increasing group is the adult student with his or her own set of academic needs. Things are changing, and perhaps the Wyoming Conference and other regional or national meetings can bring the conversation toward a better response than tenure to these students' needs. Perhaps they can give institutions and English departments like ours the security to do things in a new and more responsible way.

Being with students is what is important--it takes time to learn how to teach. We ten, and many others like us around the country, have that incredible number of years of experience with the novice and freshmen writers, and we should have the security to use that experience in the demanding courses of composition. A Ph.D. does not bestow upon one that ability. In fact, we are credentialed not by Ph.D.'s, but by being in the classroom, "on the

ground," so to speak. We have not established our credibility through the traditional process. Instead, we have established it through experience. Why can't we be loved tomorrow for this?

To conclude: In preparation for writing this paper, when I asked each of the instructors whether she thought our spring 1990 endeavor was worth it, nine said yes; one said yes with reservation. We realized that each of us would follow different paths, some within the university in the Academic Professional Positions that suit our needs and talents, and others of us elsewhere. Above all, we know that we are not vocational cripples who have to remain in DePaul's English department to find the fulfillment, challenges, and job security we seek. We came to DePaul with incredible and varied talent, and that talent has only been enhanced by our time here. Over the next few years, we will move ahead within and outside of the university, and we will find those who will love us tomorrow.

Thank you to my nine colleagues, many of whose ideas and words are this paper: Evelyn Asch, Liz Coughlin, Sharon Dixon, Susan Jacobs, Karen Knowles, Mary Miritello, Eileen Seifert, Pamela Sourelis, and Elizabeth-Anne Vanek.

Post script: March 1993

As I write to submit this paper for publication, I note that our department has grown substantially* with the addition of new tenure-track faculty and of non-tenure-track faculty--nine new ones--who fill our positions as we leave. The same basic system is in place.

It is remarkable though that a number of us still remain at DePaul in new positions. Our dean has lived up to his promise. Those of you reading this document might like to know where we are. Of the 10 of us, two of us are in their final contract years and contemplating their futures; one is on maternity leave and will return to teach her final year in 1994; one has enrolled in an MFA in Writing program and opened her own consulting business; the other six of us have filled the following academic-staff positions at DePaul: Assistant Director of the Master's in Liberal Studies Program, Associate Director for the Center for Urban Education, University Minister, Director of College ESL Programs, Assistant Director of the Writing Programs, and Assistant Director of The Writing Center. These six 12-month academic-staff positions include teaching between four and six composition courses (and perhaps literature courses) each year in addition to the administrative duties of these jobs.

Musing back on this paper from the vantage point of three years later, I find myself doing an analysis. In brief, the situations have caused thoughtful reassessment, and because of the people we ten are, we have forged our own opportunities and made decisions that

---

* Currently, our English department has approximately 66 members. 19 are full-time, tenure-track positions. There are ll non-tenure-track instructors (that designation which this paper addresses) and six Instructional Associates (see page 3). The rest are part-time instructors.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

work for us at the present. The academic staff positions six of us have taken have expanded our worlds and contributed to the growth of our talents. We do these jobs well, and we are not unhappy. The down side is that in reality, these positions are for the most part dead-end jobs with few "advancement" possibilities. Perhaps the great new horizons will be seen by those of us who are thinking about MFA's in writing or doing something completely divorced from the university setting. Perhaps no one should teach writing forever.

Whatever happens, the outcomes will be paradoxical. We find ourselves reflecting on that quite often. We will broaden our horizons which is good, but the fact that it is not our choice to do so, and that the same limiting system remains in place, is essentially bad. Our successes are tempered by this seemingly perpetual reality.

In the end, I believe those who have the much-needed long-term experience and passion to teach in a freshman writing program should not be limited by policies such as ours. Good teaching should merit the security to give further and to grow. Writing is exceedingly difficult to teach well, and to master, and freshmen need to be excited and challenged by the work of writing in order to gain all they can from a university experience. The motivation and knowledge to learn to appreciate writing well comes from special teachers, and the university must value them. Fine teaching should be valued regardless of credentials, and fine teachers should have choice and as much security as their colleagues do in their professional lives.

Linda Hillman is the Director of College ESL Programs at DePaul University.